

Influence of Poverty on Human Trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between poverty and human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study objective was to ascertain how poverty influences human trafficking in Awka south Local Government Area of Anambra State. In Nigeria, high poverty rate is deemed to be one of the drivers of human trafficking. High level of poverty in the country cause families to give away their children to foster parents who sometimes sell these children to traffickers. Traffickers usually promise parents and desperate youths easy financial freedom in other cities or countries, and oftentimes they discover that they have fallen into deception trap and tend to face harsh conditions in foreign lands which they have to endure if they must survive. The theoretical thrust of this study is the Marxian theory associated with the German Philosopher Karl Marx (1818 – 1883). The Marxian theory draws attention to the polarisation of society into upper and lower classes and how this leads to class struggle. The upper class who also forms the ruling class lords it over the lower class made up of the ordinary people by appropriating more than their fair share of the common wealth thereby condemning a greater majority of the people to poverty. Cross – sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. This is a design in which information is collected from only a fraction of the population known as a sample selected in such a way as to represent the whole population. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire used to collect quantitative data. Multi – stage sampling procedure comprising of simple random and systematic sampling techniques was used to select two hundred and four (204) respondents for the study. Data generated through the questionnaires was analysed using frequency tables and simple percentages while the hypothesis that was formulated for the study was tested using the Chi-square () test statistic. The study found that poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka south Local Government Area of Anambra State. Based on this finding, the study recommends amongst others that government should empower families in Awka south Local Government Area to have access to regular sources of income.

Key Words: Human trafficking, Poverty, Poverty rate, Empowerment, Income

INTRODUCTION

Globally, human trafficking cannot be divorced from the phenomenon of slavery (Emeozor, 2015). This is because both involve the acquisition and transportation of humans across local, national and international borders for servitude, with or without the consent of the trafficked person(s) (Barner, Okech and Camp, 2014). Slavery is a social action of involuntary servitude imposed by one person or group upon another (Oshadare, 2014). The Slavery phenomenon appeared when the early humans reached the pastoral stage of development (Whitman and Gray, 2015). Slavery then was modest with regards to the number of slaves because the care of flocks required only a few hands. Omolola (2015) noted that a more dramatic change in the character and complexity of slavery came in the 15th and mid-19th centuries when many Africans were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean as slaves in what later became known as the trans-Atlantic trade (Adesina, 2015). The intercontinental slave trade, which involved Europeans and Africans, was carried out throughout the continents of Europe and Africa (Omolola, 2015).

Although it has been over 200 years since slavery was officially abolished, there are millions of people across the world who are still subjected to slave-like conditions (Omolola, 2015; Greenbaum, 2017). Human trafficking is the biggest and fastest means by which people are exploited and forced into modern slavery (Barner, Oktech, and Camp, 2014; Omolola, 2015). Human trafficking is defined as the practice of illegally transporting people from one country or area to another, typically for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation. Trafficking of humans is a serious crime and a grave violation of human rights (Gonzalez, 2015). Every year, thousands of men, women and children fall into the hands of traffickers, in their own countries and abroad. Today, almost every country in the world is affected by human trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims (Adesina, 2014).

Trafficking of persons is a serious threat to human security and economic development. Hundreds of people are forced by ever-worsening environmental, economic and social circumstances into situations of labour and sexual exploitation both within and outside the African continent every year (Adesina, 2014; Greenbaum, 2017). Victims of human trafficking are often lured by promises of steady employment as shopkeepers, housemaids, seamstress, nannies or hotel services positions and attendants in the major cities in European countries and are eventually forced into prostitution on getting to the destination (Yaagoubi, 2017).

In Africa, human trafficking is an ugly fact that is prevalent. It cuts across all ages and involves both young and old; it is a serious issue in almost all African countries (Oshadare, 2014). Over the years, it has reached its peak without showing any sign of reduction in countries like Togo, Niger, Libya, Ghana, Nigeria and others (Fitzgibbon, 2003). It is important to note that the increasing cases of human trafficking in Africa is due to the undeterred efforts of the operators and profiteers of the business who are quick to cite unprecedented poverty as their driving force (Fitzgibbon, 2003). Thus, Tola (2015), argued that human trafficking is the third largest criminal activity in Africa after arms and drug trafficking. Increasing airport scrutiny of travel documents has compelled traffickers in Africa to take their human cargo through land borders (Gacinya, 2019). These human traffickers normally initiate safe-houses throughout African routes, moving their victims through the desert to Morocco or by vehicles to other parts of Africa (Onyejekwe, 2005). In some cases, victims are moved from Africa to Spain by fast boats. This unfortunate journey is always brutal and can last for weeks while many of the victims suffer untold hardships and sometimes die crudely in the desert or while clandestinely crossing the high sea (Gacinya, 2003).

In Nigeria, some parents willingly hand over their children to relatives and sometimes strangers to train them because they have no money to train their children properly, little do they know that days and sometimes weeks later they cannot hear or see their children again, and that the trusted relative or stranger only played on their intelligence and is nowhere to be found (Abdullahi, Deribe, and Mustapha, 2014). This paper therefore examines how the high rate of poverty in Nigeria fuels and encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

It is estimated that 21 million victims are trapped in modern-day slavery, out of this number 14.2 million are exploited for labour, 4.5 million are sexually exploited, and 2.2 million are exploited in state-imposed forced labour (Abdulraheem and Oladipo, 2010). Human trafficking is thought to be one of the fastest-growing activities of trans-national criminal organizations and has been condemned as a violation of human rights by international conventions (Adepelumi, 2015). Furthermore, at least 60 percent of foreign prostitutes in Italy are from African countries with most of them coming from Nigeria. Nigeria and Italian authorities estimates that there are about 10,000 to 15,000 Nigerian prostitutes in Italy alone (Oshadare, 2014; Tola, 2015).

Poverty is a major problem that encourages human trafficking in Nigeria and a compelling factor that leads to human abuse (Wuyah and mailamba, 2019). Most times victims of human trafficking attempt to move away from areas of high poverty to areas with less poverty.

In this instance, it is the desire of victims to migrate to escape poverty which is a situation usually exploited by traffickers (Iyanda and Nwogwugwu, 2016). Poverty makes family members to become desperate in their desire to obtain a better life for themselves and their families. Consequently, poor families are easily manipulated with false promises of easy money (Gacinya, 2019). In reality, the traffickers do not follow through on any of the promises (Oshadare, 2014; Tola, 2015). The victims are then forced to do other works like prostitution or hard labour receiving little or no pay. Due to poverty, some parents sell their children. In some instances, victims are told to work to pay off debts and also warned that consequences include police involvement or deportation (Erdoo, Ochai, Akwuma, and Ochebele, 2023).

Study Objective

- This study sought to examine how poverty influences human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Research Question

- How does the high level of poverty in Nigeria influence human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

Study Hypothesis

- There is a significant relationship between the high level of poverty in Nigeria generally and high incidence of human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical thrust of this study is the Marxian theory. The Marxian theory argues that in every class society, there exists antagonistic social groups and classes whose values, goals, interests and ideologies conflict (Marx, 1844; 1964). Hence, due to value differences and opposing class interests in the society; poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and unemployment exist because the system prevents the poor (unemployed men and women) from obtaining the necessary resources to overcome poverty (Marx, 1844; 1964). Marxian theory is chosen as the theoretical framework because it assumes that lack of jobs, low wages and high cost of living occasioned by bad leadership creates an opportunity for human traffickers to have a safe haven (Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman, and Moore, 2013). Lack of food, clothing, and housing encourage people to migrate and look for better opportunities, and it is through this search for opportunities that youths fall prey in the hands of heartless human beings who lure them with false and unrealistic promises of better life at the other side of the divide (Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman, and Moore, 2013).

Furthermore, Marxian theory views human trafficking through a lens that looks at groups that possess power and economic resources and then use it to exploit vulnerable members of the society (Marx, 1844; 1964). Dominant groups vary in each nation, but may include groups that share the majority religion, ethnic background, geographical region or higher positions of authority.

Thus, powerless Nigerians (including children, youths, men, women etc) are more likely to become victims of human trafficking, and their powerlessness can allow human traffickers to exploit them for the purposes of forced labour, prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation such as commercial pornography (Chai, 2018).

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Poverty is one of the several factors that make individuals vulnerable to human trafficking. While trafficking victims come from a range of backgrounds, including from economically privileged families,

human trafficking is linked inextricably with people that lack economic resources in the society (Tola, 2015). The connection between poverty and human trafficking is often bridged by child and forced marriages. Marrying off a young daughter can appeal to impoverished families for a number of reasons; it eliminates one hungry mouth. Young girls are not expected to have large dowries, so the younger she gets married the less strain there is on the family, and parents feel assured that their daughters will be provided for by marrying someone older. The devastating reality is that many of these young marriages are just a pretext to obtain poor, uneducated girls who will then be sold and trafficked into slavery (Bassey, 2017). Sometimes even if the marriage is honest on the part of the groom, the young bride will run away or in some other way enrage her husband so that he decides to get rid of the wife by trading her for cash (Hassan, 2012). This situation is widespread in Northern Nigeria, especially in states such as Borno and Katsina that share boundaries with other African countries (Hassan, 2012).

Poverty has been identified as the root cause of international human trafficking, and according to the report every reduction in Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) makes the country 12 times more likely to be a source for international human trafficking victims (World Bank, 2016). Labour has become even less profitable than it was in the past so that agricultural land owners cannot afford to pay their workers a living wage. In an attempt to bring more money into the family, women and young girls join the job market. Since they are not typically hired for agricultural work, they are restricted to household work, sales and informal service jobs where they often work in near-slave conditions working long hours for almost no money. Thus, instead of helping to reduce their circle of poverty, human trafficking has further worsened poverty situations in many families in Nigeria (World Bank, 2016). Therefore, fighting poverty is more than providing clean drinking water; it is about providing a future, providing options for a community. When a family has enough to eat, they do not sell their children or marry them off when they are still under aged. when girls are educated they can contribute more to economic fortunes of the family than sex and babies, and they hold a higher value. Unfortunately, there will always be people in the world who are willing to take advantage of desperate circumstances such as human traffickers (Bassey, 2017; Chai, 2018).

According to Kazeem (2013), unlike the push factors where people are pushed out of their homes to other destinations in search of better conditions of life as a result of poverty, pull factors involve situations where people are on their own attracted to leave their homes to destinations with less poverty and more opportunities. This may be due to the need for low skilled labour, high profit and low risk. In this context, the rapid expansion of broadcast and telecommunication media, including the internet, across the developing world may have increased the desire to migrate to developed countries, and with desire by children, the vulnerability of would-be migrants is usually high.

Adepoju (2015) stated that since human trafficking is perceived as an act of coercion; most response from the government focus predominantly on prosecuting traffickers and protecting trafficked persons. However, human trafficking is a multi-dimensional social problem caused by socio-economic challenges as well as demand for the exploitative use of human beings (Wuyah and Mailamba, 2019). There is a reason behind the emphasis on poverty as one of the fundamental factors influencing human trafficking. Zannah (2016) opined that household poverty and extreme lack of the basic necessities of life tend to increase individual vulnerability to human trafficking as it makes one not to benefit from any practical step taken to address the menace; if one is enlightened and financially stable this will make him to understand the nature of any event or occurrence. In most countries including Nigeria where human trafficking is rising steadily, poverty is a common factor that encourages trafficking of persons. In other words, lack of money which often culminates into hunger makes people susceptible or vulnerable to human traffickers (Zannah, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the cross-sectional survey design. The area of the study was Awka South Local Government Area which was created in 1989 from Awka Local Government Area. Awka South LGA comprises of nine (9) communities, namely; Awka, Amawbia, Ezinato, Nibo, Nise, Umuawulu, Isiagu, Okpuno, and Mbaukwu.

The target population for the study was 174,225 comprising of persons aged 18 years and above who were living in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State at the time of carrying out this study. Taro Yamane’s sample size determination formula was used to determine a sample size of 204 respondents. Multistage sampling procedure made up of simple random, cluster, and systematic sampling techniques was used to select the respondents for the study. This sampling technique was adopted so as to adequately handle the large population. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire schedule. Data was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and simple percentages were used for the presentation, interpretation, and analysis of the data for easy understanding and clarity. The hypothesis formulated for the study was tested using Chi – Square inferential statistic.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Two hundred and twenty-four (204) copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. However, one hundred and ninety-five (195) copies of the questionnaires were correctly filled and returned. Consequently, the data analysis was carried out based on the 195 copies of correctly filled and returned questionnaires.

Personal Data of Respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age, education, marital status, employment status, income status, place of residence among others are presented in table 1

Table 1: Personal Data of Respondents

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender		
Male	77	39.5
Female	118	60.5
Total	195	100.0
Age of respondents		
18-27	54	27.7
28-37	81	41.5
38-47	41	21.0
48-57	16	8.2
58 and above	3	1.5
Total	195	100.0
Level of educational attainment		
No formal education	23	11.8
FSLC	44	22.6
SSCE	101	51.8
OND/NCE	12	6.2
B.Sc./HND	15	7.7
Post graduate degrees	0	.0
Total	195	100.0
Marital status		
Single	121	62.1

Married	67	34.4
Separated	2	1.0
Widowed	5	2.6
Total	195	100.0
Religious affiliation		
Christianity	175	89.7
Traditional religion	18	9.2
Islam	2	1.0
Total	195	100.0
Employment status		
Unemployed	68	34.9
Employed	60	30.8
Underemployed	67	34.3
Total	195	100.0
Monthly income		
Below ₦ 50,000	159	81.5
₦ 51,000- ₦ 100,000	24	12.3
₦ 101,000 and above	12	6.2
Total	195	100.0
Place of residence		
Urban area	72	36.9
Rural area	123	63.1
Total	195	100.0

Field Survey, 2022

Table 1 indicates that 39.5% of the respondents are males while 60.5% are females. This shows that majority of the respondents in this study are females. This could infer that females outnumber males in the study area. Age distribution of the respondents shows that 27.7% of the respondents are within the ages of 18-27 years, 41.5% are between the ages of 28-37 years, 21.0% of the respondents are within the age categories of 38-47 years while 1.5% of the respondents are 58 years and above. This implies that majority of the respondents are within the ages of 28–37 years. This could mean that younger people are more in number than the older people in the study area. With regards to level of educational attainment, table 1 shows that 11.8% of the respondents do not have formal education, 22.6% of them have FSLC, 51.8% of them have SSCE certificates, 6.2% have OND/NCE, 7.7% have B.Sc./HND results while none of the respondents has post graduate degree. It follows therefore that most of the respondents have SSCE certificates. In terms of marital status, table 1 indicates that 62.1% of the respondents are single, 34.4% of them are married, 1.0% are separated while 2.6% are widowed. This implies that many of the respondents in this study are young and active youths.

Furthermore, table 1 shows that 89.7% of the respondents are Christians, 9.2% are traditional African religion believers while 1.0% of them are Muslims. This apparently re-affirms the fact that residents of Awka South Local Government Area are predominantly Christians. With regards to employment status, 34.9% of the respondents are unemployed, 30.8% are employed while 34.3% are underemployed, thus implying that unemployment status may have encouraged human trafficking in the study area. In terms of monthly income, table 1 shows that 81.5% of the respondents earn below N50,000, 12.3% earn between N51,000-N100,000 every month while only 6.2% of them earn N101,000 and above.

This shows that majority of the respondents are low income earners. Finally, the distribution indicates that 36.9% of the respondents live in urban areas while 63.1% of them live in rural areas. This shows that higher percentage of the respondents live in the countryside (rural areas).

Analysis of Research Question

Research Question: How does poverty contribute to human trafficking in Awka South LGA of Anambra State?

Table 2: Respondents` views on whether poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	119	61.0
No	56	28.7
I don't know	20	10.3
Total	195	100.0

Field Survey, 2022

In terms of whether or not poverty encourages human trafficking, 61.0% of the respondents said “Yes” it does, 28.7% refuted the above assertion whereas 10.3% of the respondents said they did not know the veracity of the above claim. This however means that poverty can force people to engage in human trafficking in order to survive.

Table 3: Respondents` views on how poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Communities/families experiencing extreme poverty easily fall victim of human traffickers	5	2.6
Household poverty is a fertile ground for human trafficking to flourish	27	13.8
Inadequate income can make an individual to take any risk to survive	82	42.1
Poverty makes people not to notice that some promises are too good to be true	45	23.1
Poor people are vulnerable to human trafficking because of their living conditions	36	18.5
Total	195	100.0

Field Survey, 2022

The respondents were asked to point out how poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area. 2.6% of them were of the view that communities/families experiencing extreme poverty easily fall victims to human traffickers. 13.8% said household poverty is a fertile ground for human trafficking to flourish. 42.1% noted that inadequate income can make an individual to take any type of risk to survive. 23.1% agreed that poverty makes people not to notice that some promises are too good to be true while 18.5% said that poor people are vulnerable to human trafficking as a result of their living conditions. This implies that no matter how one decides to look at it, poverty is a significant social problem that does more harm than good to humanity, and residents of Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State are not spared.

Table 4: Respondents` views on whether they are aware that poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	119	61.0
No	76	39.0
Total	195	100.0

Field Survey, 2022

Table 4 shows that 61.0% of the respondents are very much aware that poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area. In the same way, 39.0% of the respondents insisted that they are not aware that poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area. The implication of this finding is that many respondents are familiar with the effect of poverty on human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area, just that they do not know how to mitigate the situation.

Test of Hypothesis

The hypotheses postulated for this study has been re-stated and tested as follows: –

Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between the high level of poverty in Nigeria and the crime of human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Data in table 4 formed the basis for testing hypothesis 1.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation between poverty and human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area

<i>What is your monthly income?</i>	<i>Are you aware that poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South LGA?</i>		
	Yes	No	Total
Below ?50,000 (poor)	91	68	159
?51,000-100,000 (average)	16	8	24
?101,000 and above (High)	12	0	12
Total	119	76	195

$$x^2 = 17.534, df = 2, p = 0.002$$

Table 5 shows that the computed value of chi-square is 17.534, while the table value of chi-square at 0.05 level of significance with a degree of freedom (df) of 2 is 5.991. Since the computed value of chi-square is greater than tabulated value, the alternative hypothesis was accepted while the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between poverty and human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. In other words, poverty is one of the major reasons human trafficking occurs in Awka South Local Government.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Majority of the respondents asserted that poverty encourages human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area. When asked to indicate how poverty encourages human trafficking, a higher percentage (42.1%) of the respondents said inadequate income can make an individual to take any risk to survive. In the same vein, other respondents observed that communities and families experiencing extreme poverty easily fall victim to human traffickers, that household poverty is a fertile ground for human trafficking to flourish, it makes youths not to see that some promises are too good to be true.

The remaining respondents indicated that poor people are vulnerable to human trafficking because of their poor living conditions. These findings support the work of Akaigwe (2014) who reported that poverty was the major factor influencing human trafficking. Some families believe that human trafficking is the better option available, given the fact that they lack adequate socio-economic resources. This implies that poverty may account for cross-generation of human trafficking within a nation. Similarly, Chibuzor (2013) stated that poverty-stricken families are easily deceived into human trafficking because of their low socio-economic status.

The finding from the test of the hypothesis formulated to guide this study shows that there is a significant relationship between the high level of poverty in Nigeria generally and the crime of human trafficking in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. In other words, poverty is one of the major reasons why people engage in human trafficking.

CONCLUSION

Human trafficking is a phenomenon that has become a serious source of concern to governments around the globe and Nigeria has been identified as one of the trafficking routes and destination points in Africa. Human trafficking is a major threat to human security and economic development. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are forced by ever worsening environmental, economic and social circumstances into situations of labour and sexual exploitation both within and outside their immediate social environment. It has been found out through research that one of the major factors promoting the illegal business of human trafficking in our setting is poverty. Few years back, the World Bank declared Nigeria the poverty headquarters of the world. This means that Nigeria harbours the largest number of poor people that could be found in any one country in the entire globe. In desperate search of means of livelihood, many Nigerians end up in the hands of human traffickers who take them out of the country and engage them in exploitative ventures that yield enormous profit to them. Unless the poverty level in the country reduces through deliberate efforts of Government to create job opportunities for Nigerians, human trafficking will continue to be a thriving and lucrative business in country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings of this study;

1. Government should urgently formulate policies intentionally geared towards alleviating poverty in Nigeria. In other words, Government should initiate policies that ensure that people receive financial empowerment that helps to reduce the rate of poverty in the population.
2. Government should provide jobs for the unemployed youths and empower families in Awka South Local Government Area to have access to steady sources of income.
3. Religious leaders should organize sensitization workshops to educate members of the public on newer strategies used by human traffickers in Nigeria.

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